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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DUSHANBE 001599

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SUBJECT: DEMARCHE ON RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN  
TAJIKISTAN

REF: STATE 149413

CLASSIFIED BY: Tracey A. Jacobson, Ambassador, American Embassy  
Dushanbe, Department of State.  
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (SBU) Summary: A discussion with the Foreign Ministry regarding the Jehovah's Witnesses and the National Democratic Institute produced a little sympathy but no breakthroughs from the Ministry, and highlighted the need for more personal diplomacy at all levels to educate the Tajik Government about our concerns on human rights. End Summary.

Jehovah's Witnesses  
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¶2. (SBU) On November 2 Deputy Chief of Mission and Poloff discussed our concerns described in reftel demarche with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Director of North American Affairs, Ismatullo Nasredinov. Mr. Nasredinov said that he had passed our points on the recent ban of Jehovah's Witnesses to the Ministry of Culture, and that the Ministry of Culture would give a reply to our concerns sometime in the near future.

¶3. (SBU) Mr. Nasredinov commented that dealing with new religions is difficult for the Tajik Government and people. He argued that "as you know, we opened the door to all groups in the past, and lost control of the situation" (apparently referring to the civil war of the 1990s). We countered that by suppressing religious groups, either through official bans or through legislation restricting their activities, risked radicalizing these groups, leading to another loss of government control.

¶4. (C) Mr. Nasredinov expressed his personal sympathy for the U.S. position, and said the Jehovah's Witnesses needed "a good local lawyer" and should pursue overturning the recent ban on them through the courts. However, he also argued that Tajik society was "not ready" for new religious groups. When we asked about the seizure of a shipping container of Jehovah's Witnesses literature, Mr. Nasredinov said that the Jehovah's Witnesses had brought this on themselves by mislabeling their shipment of literature as "equipment." [Note: this is the first time the embassy has heard this allegation.]

National Democratic Institute  
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¶5. (C) Regarding the National Democratic Institute, we suggested to Mr. Nasredinov that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was doing all the dirty work for the State Committee on National Security and Justice Ministry, which are the major opponents of registering the National Democratic Institute. As long as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs refuses to issue a longer term visa to National Democratic Institute Representative Harry Bader, the Ministry of Justice will have a rationale, under the new Law on Public Associations, for not registering the non-governmental

organization. The refusal of a long-term visa amounted to a de facto refusal to register the Institute.

¶6. (C) Mr. Nasredinov replied that he had recently met the Minister of Justice himself ("we are friends"), and the Minister had expressed surprise at the notion that he was against registering the National Democratic Institute. The Minister said that the Justice Ministry would of course process and approve the Institute's registration as a normal matter. Mr. Nasredinov said that he foresaw a "new era" in relations between the Government of Tajikistan and the National Democratic Institute, and said he would "try to give Mr. Bader a longer-term visa." We pointed out that according to Tajikistan's own laws it needed to be at least a six-month visa, and Mr. Nasredinov took note.

MFA - This is Nice, But Not a Real Issue  
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¶7. (C) Mr. Nasredinov said that he understood our general concerns and sympathized with us, did not want the human rights issue to give Tajikistan "a bad reputation" - nor did he believe that human rights concerns were "real issues" that could affect Tajik-U.S. relations. He suggested that security, counterterrorism, regional stability, and Afghanistan were the issues that "really mattered." We explained the U.S. view that security and stability don't grow out of the barrel of a gun, that political pluralism and respect for human rights are fundamental preconditions for real stability and prosperity, and were central elements in our foreign policy, including in Central Asia. Mr. Nasredinov then suggested it would be useful if a congressional delegation visited Dushanbe, to give high ranking Tajik officials a broader view of U.S. interests than that presented by the State Department. We noted that such a visit would help make clear to Tajik officials that human rights and religious freedom had a wider constituency in the United States than the MFA might imagine.

¶8. (C) Comment: The meeting did not produce an official

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response from the Government to our concerns, but was cordial and highlighted the mutual non-comprehension that often characterizes our interactions with the Tajik Government in the area of human rights and religious freedom. Mr. Nasredinov is one of the more talented and open minded officials we know. Post will continue to press for registration of the National Democratic Institute and due process for the Jehovah's Witnesses in the Tajik justice system. The interest in a congressional delegation poses a dilemma: Such high level visits could be useful to highlight the importance of democratic development alongside economic and security issues. End Comment.  
JACOBSON